

## **Political Conflict and Power Sharing in the Origins of Modern Colombia**

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Colombia has not always been a violent country. In fact, for the first half of the twentieth century, Colombia was one of the most peaceful countries in Latin America, standing out in the region as a highly stable and competitive bipartisan democracy. When faced with the critical test for political stability in that epoch, the Great Depression of 1930, Colombia was the only big country in South America in which military interventions were not even considered. While an armed coup interrupted Argentina's until then steady path to democracy, and Getulio Vargas installed the first modern dictatorship in Brazil, Colombia celebrated elections as scheduled. Moreover, the ruling party lost the contest, did not make any move to cling to power, and calmly transferred power to the opposition.

However, Colombia was not born peaceful. That half-century of peaceful political existence was a major novelty in Colombian history. Colombia's nineteenth century was politically chaotic even by Hispanic American standards: the record includes nine national civil wars, dozens of local revolts and mutinies, material destruction equivalent to the loss of several years of economic output, and at least 250,000 deaths due to political violence.

How did Colombia make the transition from political chaos to political order? What were the causes of conflict before the turn of the century, and what were the bases of internal peace after it? The emergence of order in Colombia was temporally correlated with a major transformation of political institutions: the introduction of special mechanisms for power sharing between Liberals and Conservatives, Colombia's two dominant political forces. The central thesis of this paper is that the correlation between the emergence of order and the

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introduction of power-sharing institutions is not coincidental but causal. Before 1905, institutions favoring power monopolization by a single party forced the opposition into revolutionary tactics and the government into violent repression, whereas starting in 1905 the emergence of institutions ensuring both parties a share of political power roughly proportional to their electoral force allowed for a peaceful interaction between government and opposition. From the standpoint of power-sharing mechanisms, the key institutional change was the replacement in 1905 of majoritarian rule by the incomplete vote, a special kind of electoral system. Colombia in turn switched from the incomplete vote to proportional representation in 1929.

### **From Chaos to Order: Changing and Enduring Political Patterns**

Standard periodization divides Colombian political history between 1860 and 1930 into two blocks of time, known as Olimpo Radical (Radical Olympus) and *Hegemonía Conservadora* (Conservative Hegemony), each of which is characterized by the dominance of one of the two parties and a different set of policies. During the Olimpo Radical, from 1860 to the early 1880s, Liberals were in power. It was a period of frantic institutional reform designed by the “Radical” faction of the party to eradicate Colombia’s heavy colonial heritage. Prominent among these reforms were the most extreme version of federalism ever known in the Americas (allowing provincial armies and banning central intervention in interstate conflicts), a frontal attack on the institutional and cultural power of the Catholic Church (expropriations of wealth, removal from education, and expulsion of the Jesuit order), and a number of free-market policies. The intended and unintended consequences of Radical Liberal reforms—especially the hostility of ample sectors of a deeply Catholic population and the increasing inability of the central government to stop threats of territorial fragmentation—provoked the Conservative reaction. After a failed revolt in 1876–77, Conservatives formed a coalition with dissident Liberals, headed by “Independent” Rafael Núñez, which managed to displace Radical Liberals from power in the early 1880s. The *Hegemonía Conservadora* was inaugurated in 1885, after Núñez’s government crushed a revolution by Radical Liberals attempting to regain power, and lasted until 1930. During the subperiod known as *La Regeneración* (1885–1900), almost every component of the Radical experiment was reversed: power was recentralized; states lost their political autonomy; the authority of the president was reinforced and granted extraordinary powers; and the political, economic, and cultural position of the church was restored. Less spectacular were reversals in economic policy, which nevertheless included a

significant increase in tariffs and new powers for the government to intervene in the economy, especially the supply of money.

From another perspective, based not on party or policy distinctions but on levels and kinds of political conflict, the period between 1850 and 1950 can be divided into two blocks of time, the first, before 1905, marked by interparty warfare and the second defined by peaceful power sharing. This of course implies a subdivision of the Conservative Hegemony, conventionally viewed as a single period.

Parties were the main architects of the emergence of political order after 1905. But they had also been the main forces responsible for political chaos and material destruction before that date. Up until the beginning of the twentieth century, both Liberal and Conservative parties were partly electoral and partly military organizations, with proportions fluctuating over time. Military superiority was the key condition to access and keep control of government. Although from 1860 to 1900 the vast majority of government changes followed constitutional prescriptions, the only two transfers of power from one party to the other occurred via military force (Mosquera's takeover in 1861, and Núñez's repression of Radicals in 1885). Before 1905, then, party alternation in power was a rare and violent event.

The pattern of interparty warfare was a broader phenomenon than the two episodes of violent takeover by the opposition. It also included several failed revolutions, for instance, the 1876–77 war under the Radical Liberal government, and the 1895 war and the Thousand Days' War (1899–1902) under La Regeneración. Furthermore, as revealed during the discrete periods of open war, party warfare also involved substantial periods of preparation for repression by the government and organization of revolution by the opposition. When Radical Liberals were in power, for instance, private armies became a frequent phenomenon, whereas under La Regeneración a series of "diplomatic missions" to neighboring countries were dispatched by the Liberal Party in order to collect weapons for the revolutionary arsenal.

The disappearance of warfare as a pattern of interparty relations defines the passage from chaos to order. At the same time, a pattern that persisted from one period to the other was the recurrence of internal divisions within the parties, along with the strategic utilization of splits by the rival party. Faced with the division of the governing party into an official and a dissident faction, the opposition would attempt a coalition with the dissident faction in order to displace the official faction from government. Instances of this pattern include the already mentioned alliance of the Independent or Nuñista faction of the Liberal Party with the Conservatives in the early 1880s; flirtations throughout

the 1890s between Liberalism and a moderate Conservative faction opposed to La Regeneración's policies; the "Republican Union," which won the presidential election of 1910 and was formed by factions from both parties that had opposed president Rafael Reyes (1905–9); and the election of Conservative José Vicente Concha for president in 1914, which counted on the support of the Liberal faction that had been left out of the Republican Union. While bipartisan alliances were a long-standing feature of Colombian politics, they changed from common military fronts to peaceful electoral coalitions along with the transition from chaos to order around 1905. Here we argue that the transition from chaos to order in Colombia, which involved the replacement of military fronts by electoral coalitions as the typical pattern of interparty relations, was caused by a change of electoral system.

### **What Are Electoral Systems?**

Electoral systems are rules that convert popular votes into seats in legislatures; they translate electoral support for a party into institutional power. Electoral rules are usually classified by means of two polar types: proportional versus majoritarian representation. A perfectly proportional rule (PR) would assign a party a portion of the total seats in congress that is exactly the same as its share of electoral support. Under perfect proportionality, for instance, a party that is voted for by 32 percent of the electorate would get 32 percent of the seats in congress. In contrast, the majoritarian extreme assigns all seats in congress to the party that has earned the largest number of votes, no matter whether it received 75 percent, 51 percent, or 32 percent of the votes. Majoritarian systems thus introduce a distortion between level of popular support and institutional power: for the winner of the electoral contest, they amplify in congress its popular power, and they weaken (or even nullify) that of the rest of the parties.

In practice, pure forms of proportional or majoritarian representation do not exist. Proportional rule, for instance, is usually combined with the use of "thresholds," that is, the requirement that parties must receive a minimum portion of votes (e.g., 5 percent) in order to be represented. As parties below the threshold do not get any seats, parties above it are overrepresented. Similarly, majoritarian representation is usually combined with the subdivision of the national political arena into a number of subnational districts, each of which holds elections to choose a fraction of the total number of seats in the legislatures. Even if each district uses a majoritarian rule and hence sends to congress only representatives from the winning party, the subdivision of a country into

districts in practice prevents the existence of single-colored congresses, for different parties usually prevail in different districts.

The incomplete vote is a special kind of electoral rule. Like PR, it allocates seats in a single district to more than one party, generally the two largest ones. Like majoritarian rule, it assigns a fixed portion of seats to the parties, which is defined beforehand (e.g., three-quarters to the winner and one-quarter to the runner-up, or two-thirds and one-third), irrespective of the number of votes received by each force. That is, under the incomplete vote, what is at stake in the electoral contest is who the winner is and who the runner-up is, but the relative institutional power that they will have is established before the election.

Electoral rules have obvious proximate effects on the distribution of institutional power among political parties, and that is why party leaders invest so much time in congress looking for support for their preferred rule. In general, parties that are small or expect to become small advocate proportional representation, whereas majoritarian rules favor the interests of parties with 50 percent or more of the electoral support. Electoral rules are also considered to have important deep effects on the capacity of elected authorities to govern and on political stability. In fact, positive proximate effects are in general associated with negative deep effects, and vice versa—the so-called trade-off between representativeness and governability. Majoritarian rules score low on representativeness because they tend to leave small parties with no seats in the legislatures, but they foster stability by inducing clear institutional majorities. Proportional rules favor the representation of different parties but the frequent lack of clear majorities and the larger number of parties in congress make coalition formation and decision making more difficult, potentially resulting in power vacuums. In the Colombian case, however, no trade-off between representativeness and governability existed during the period 1850–1950. In fact, as we will see, Colombia's stability after 1905 was achieved by making the political system more representative.

### **The Colombian Transition to Proportional Representation**

The transition from majoritarian to proportional electoral institutions in Colombia involved two key reforms, separated from each other by almost a quarter century. In 1905 majoritarian rule was replaced by the incomplete vote, which established that the party that won the elections would get two-thirds of the seats and the remaining one-third would be allocated to the runner-up, irrespective of the specific percentages of votes. The incomplete vote was in

turn replaced by the quotient rule, a standard version of PR, in 1929; since then, Colombian elections have relied on proportional representation.

Both the incomplete vote and the quotient rule were the visible results of an extended, albeit intermittent, negotiation process between the Conservative and Liberal parties. Both reforms were introduced while the Conservative Party was in power, during the second half of the Conservative Hegemony. Neither the introduction of the incomplete vote in 1905 nor its replacement by PR in 1929, however, fit the prevailing explanations of electoral reform, most of which are variations of Stein Rokkan's pioneering account of Scandinavian cases.<sup>1</sup> According to Rokkan, reforms to majoritarian rule occur when a Conservative Party in power anticipates that, with social modernization and the rise of Left parties, Conservatives would become a minority force and hence that their future position in the political arena would be better served by proportional representation than by majority rule.

In contrast to Rokkan's scenario of a retreating Conservative Party, both reforms in the Colombian transition to PR were introduced at a time when the Conservatives were expecting, correctly or mistakenly, that their dominant position would remain unchallenged well into the future. Furthermore, for both Colombian parties it was apparent that the Conservatives' share of legislative seats would be larger under majoritarian rule than under any alternative electoral institution, including the incomplete vote and the quotient rule. Hence, the electoral reform was meant to reduce, rather than enhance, the future institutional power of the party in government. As an additional contrast with Rokkan's depiction of the Scandinavian process, where electoral reform was a spontaneous and unilateral decision of the party in power, the incomplete vote and quotient rule in Colombia were a concession made by the Conservative government to the Liberal opposition, which had advocated electoral reform for several years and benefited directly in terms of the subsequent reallocation of legislative seats.

If electoral reform in Colombia was not imposed by the Conservative government but resulted instead from negotiations between the Conservative government and the Liberal opposition, and if reform caused a reduction of the Conservative Party's power in Congress, the key issue is this: what did Conservatives obtain in exchange for such concessions? What motivated the Conservatives' acceptance of an electoral reform that would redistribute institutional positions in favor of their political rival?

1. Stein Rokkan, *Citizens, Elections, Parties: Approaches to the Comparative Study of the Process of Development* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1970), 150–57.

It is in the specific terms of the Conservative-Liberal exchange that the 1905 reform and the 1929 reform differ. In 1905 the Conservative Party viewed electoral reform as a means to achieve political pacification: the incomplete vote would prevent military insurrections by the Liberals. Prior to 1905, the political exclusion of the opposition, as well as the disproportion between Liberal vote share and seat share caused by majoritarian institutions, had encouraged Liberals to pose an almost permanent threat of civil war. With the incomplete vote, Conservatives agreed to increase the Liberal Party's share of legislative power from a fluctuating 0–5 percent to a fixed 33 percent of the seats, which in the Colombian bipartisan context necessarily occurred at the expense of the Conservatives' own portion of power. Conservatives traded size for stability: they opted for a smaller but safer share of legislative seats. Increased minority representation in Congress would dissuade the Liberal opposition from insurrection.

In 1929, on the other hand, political stability was not at stake. Rather, a deep division within the Conservative Party around the party's candidates for the following presidential elections pushed the two internal factions to vie for the support of the Liberal opposition. Liberals made a transitory deal with a Conservative faction that, in exchange for electoral collaboration against the other faction, gave decisive legislative support to the introduction of the quotient rule. Hence, whereas in 1905 the vast majority of the Conservative leaders agreed to a reform of electoral rules out of fear of a continuation of political chaos, in 1929 only a faction of the Conservative Party supported electoral reform, and it did so in exchange for a short-term electoral benefit.

Although the incomplete vote was a hybrid electoral formula that became obsolete in the course of a couple of decades, its role in Colombia's political history has been substantially more important than proportional representation. The introduction of the incomplete vote was a true inflection point, one that closed the chapter of recurrent civil wars that had dominated the country since independence and inaugurated a four-decade period of uninterrupted political stability. Under the incomplete vote, Liberals gave up rebellion and Conservatives stopped repression. In this sense, the incomplete vote was the pillar of the institutional environment that encouraged the development of the coffee industry and the modernization of the Colombian economy in the first half of the twentieth century.

The introduction of proportional representation, on the other hand, involved significantly smaller proximate effects on the redistribution of political power, as well as smaller deep effects on political stability. In terms of the proximate effects, whereas the incomplete vote was meant to increase ten times the

Liberals' representation in Congress, proportional representation was expected to carry a small positive adjustment in the Liberal share, from a fixed one-third of the seats under the incomplete vote to an average of 35 or 40 percent under the quotient. In terms of the deep effects, the stakes of the two reforms were dramatically different. The risks of political instability if the 1905 reform had failed would have been much higher, at least in the long run, than if the 1929 reform had failed. In 1905, leaders of both parties were remarkably aware that the continuation of majoritarian rule would have forced the Liberal Party into "anti-system" tactics, whereas in 1929, Liberals were deriving enough power from prevailing institutions to completely discard the option of insurrection. Liberals were too satisfied with the incomplete vote for the Conservative Party to believe that they would engage in civil war if it was not replaced by proportional representation. The following two sections provide, in turn, an in-depth analysis of the antecedents, causes, and effects of the 1905 and 1929 reforms.

### **The 1905 Reform**

The 1905 reform had a crucial antecedent in a failed legislative proposal to establish minority representation in 1898. For a considerable number of politicians and observers of the time, the failure of the 1898 reform proposal had catastrophic consequences. In their view, reform would have prevented the Thousand Days' War. The legislative proposal was drafted by dissident Conservative representatives who feared that Liberals would rebel against *La Regeneración* unless they were secured a portion of institutional power that reflected at least part of their electoral force. The reform proposal seemed to have majority support in Congress, but both the president and the Senate vetoed it. The political process leading to the reform proposal, its blockage, and the subsequent political repercussions illustrate the intimate connection between disproportionate distribution of power and civil war.

In post-independence Colombia, governments of both political signs resorted to legal and illegal means to minimize the opposition's share of institutional power. Nevertheless, exclusion of the opposition reached a historical peak under *La Regeneración*. In effect, the 1880s witnessed two innovations—in the composition of subnational executives and of national legislatures—that resulted in virtual monopolization of power by the Conservative Party. The 1886 Constitution, the legal basis of *La Regeneración*, put a drastic end to more than two decades of hyperfederalism by introducing a unitary system of government that empowered the president to appoint governors in all states. In practice, this legal innovation resulted in Conservative control of every subnational gov-

ernment, even in regions that were traditional bastions of Liberal support, like Santander. During *La Regeneración*, the opposition's participation in Congress also became negligible: Liberals occupied only two legislative seats between 1886 and the outbreak of war in 1899. The drastic decrease of the Liberal presence in the legislature was in part an effect of reduced electoral support and the adoption of abstention as a delegitimizing tactic. But it also reflected fraud, obstruction, and repression by the Conservative government, as well as the tighter official control over local politics and electoral boards made possible by recentralization. To weaken and obstruct the Liberal Party's organization and activities, *La Regeneración* relied on a key legal weapon, Law 61 of May 1888, known as the *Ley de los Caballos* (its pretext was the decapitation of a small drove of horses in Palmira, department of Cauca, which the government decided was evidence of Liberal conspiracy). Coupled with a decree restricting free press issued a few months earlier, Law 61 granted the president extraordinary faculties beyond the control of the Congress and the courts: it allowed the executive to unilaterally ban or repress political activities that the president himself considered "offensive of public order," a definition that conveniently provided ample leeway to neutralize the opposition. Deemed "subversive" by the government, a range of Liberal meetings and conventions were forbidden, several party leaders were sent to jail or exile, and there was almost no Liberal periodical that was not suspended or shut down. Hence, anemic legislative representation, coupled with exclusion from regional government and official persecution, narrowed Liberals' institutional power to minimal levels in Colombian history.

The politics of *La Regeneración* sparked opposition even within the rank and file of the Conservative Party. The Conservative schism can be traced back to a congressional debate in 1888 over a proposal to strengthen territorial centralization, but it intensified over the course of the following years, fueled by periodic disputes over nominations to the presidency and other political positions. Division became irreversible in 1896 when President Antonio Caro (1892–98) revealed his intention to seek reelection. The Conservative Party divided itself into a National block, which supported the government, and a dissident faction, the *Históricos*. As revealed in the writings of Carlos Martínez Silva, founder and top intellectual of the dissident movement, the *Históricos* rejected official politics on both ideological and strategic grounds. For Martínez Silva, the suppression of the opposition's political rights was not only incompatible with the Conservative Party's foundational principles but also risked the breakdown of political order by forcing Liberals into revolutionary tactics.

Revolution was, in fact, the main option for many Liberals. But the Liberal Party was also divided. Starting in 1896, the faction of the *Pacifistas*, mostly old

leaders from the Radical period, gradually lost ground to the belligerent group, a younger generation of Liberal activists headed by Rafael Uribe Uribe. Both sectors shared the goal of dismantling the exclusionary structure of La Regeneración. However, the Pacifistas considered that a rebellion would be counterproductive, given the military superiority of the government's forces, and favored the strategy of forming an alliance with the Histórico block, while Uribe and his followers viewed war and the threat of war as the only path to change.

#### 1898: Failed Reform and War

It is against the backdrop of Liberal exclusion, Conservative dissension, and danger of war that dissident Conservatives in Congress and the Senate took steps to reform the electoral law in 1898. In early August, Senator Carlos Calderón Reyes and Representatives Eliseo Arbeláez and José Vicente Concha presented separate proposals to introduce "minority representation" by means of the incomplete vote. Before joining the Histórico faction, Calderón Reyes had served in the cabinet of Caro's government and had authored the 1888 Electoral Code, which established majoritarian representation for all national and subnational Colombian elections. Ten years later, Calderón considered that his code was "full of mistakes" and that not reforming it would be equivalent "to declaring that only the party in power has the right to vote[,] consolidating a tyranny by scientific means."<sup>2</sup> Defenders of the reform in Congress drew a strong connection between power sharing and peace. Arbeláez claimed that his project of electoral reform "responded to the burning need of pacifying the spirits."<sup>3</sup>

The spirits that needed to be pacified belonged, of course, to Liberal politicians. Starting in 1891, every Liberal convention, program, and manifesto demanded electoral reform, together with the abolition of the Ley de los Caballos. Liberals wanted electoral reform in order to obtain a greater share of institutional power. They systematically denounced fraud and political exclusion, but only rarely were they clear as to the specific remedies to those problems. When the Historical Conservatives proposed the formula of the incomplete vote in 1898, Uribe led its defense as if the project had been designed by the Liberal Party itself. In the process, he advanced one of the most brilliant statements for power sharing in Colombia—and launched the strongest warning against La Regeneración. In his intervention of September 19, he stated that

2. *Anales del Senado* (hereafter cited as *AS*) 1898, pp. 105–6.

3. *Anales de la Cámara de Representantes* (hereafter cited as *ACR*) 1898, p. 313.

“Colombia’s biggest problem is that of peace. This problem can only be solved in one way: by giving justice to the Liberal Party. And that justice can only be achieved by approving the proposed reforms.”<sup>4</sup>

Even though framed in terms of “political equality,” Uribe’s discourse made clear that, for Liberals, the main grievance under *La Regeneración* was exclusion from power. After asserting that “there is no equality before the law,” he proceeded to list pieces of evidence of such inequality: “In 13 years only two Liberal representatives went to Congress, in different terms; we have never had a seat in the Senate; by chance we have had 2 delegates in the legislatures of Antioquia and Panama; when we have chosen officials for municipal councils, their terms were revoked by the president or the governor of the department; we have had nobody in the ministries, in the governorships, in the judicial branch or the electoral boards to protect and defend us.”<sup>5</sup> In Uribe’s analysis, Liberal exclusion from power involved the breakdown of the underlying “political contract.” Given that “the proportional influence in public affairs that should correspond to our party has been persistently denied,” the public should notice that “the constitutional promise has not been fulfilled: the payment in rights in exchange for our obedience has not been delivered.”<sup>6</sup>

Political analysis was followed by military ultimatum:

I am not threatening or provoking. I am not coming here as the Roman consul before the Senate of Carthage, bringing in his uniform the options “war or peace” for you to choose. I am just predicting the unavoidable. I am just warning that this, which today is a peaceful petition in favor of our rights, if you deny it, tomorrow will become a demand backed by the arms, and then, after costly sacrifices, one of two things will occur: if we win, we will give to ourselves not only what we are demanding today, or the full rights that belong to us, but even more than that, at your expense, because of the irresistible impetus given by victory; or, if we lose, not for that will our right die, and you will spend more resources in continuing oppressing us than those required to live with us in peace and equality. . . . Give us the freedom to make public and defend our rights with the vote, the quill, and the lips; otherwise, nobody in the world will have enough power to silence the barrels of our rifles.<sup>7</sup>

4. *Ibid.*, 386.

5. *Ibid.*, 389.

6. *Ibid.*, 390.

7. *Ibid.*

Faced with the option of concession or war, National Conservatives would eventually risk war. President Manuel Sanclemente shut the door to reform, instructing the Senate, where Nationals were a majority, to block the proposal. Before considering a new electoral law, Sanclemente remarked, "It would be better to wait for more peaceful times, so that an undisturbed study of experience and institutional options can suggest what is best for the public good."<sup>8</sup> With remarkable political perception, Uribe had predicted that Nationals would allege inopportune times, in anticipation of which he claimed that "reforms are the cause of appeasement, so appeasement should not be taken as a precondition for reform." To demand "serenity" before solving the grievance is like "asking a doctor to wait until the disease is gone before providing the cure."<sup>9</sup> With Sanclemente's veto, the last hopes of reform vanished, and so did the chances of peace.

If Sanclemente's hostility to reform showed that bellicose Liberals were right in that *La Regeneración* would not transform itself from inside, war confirmed that Pacifista Liberals were right in that the Conservative government was too powerful to be defeated militarily. The Thousand Days' War (October 1898–November 1902), the most destructive civil war in nineteenth-century Latin America, became a lost cause for the Liberals after their decisive defeat in the Battle of Palonegro in May 1900. A coup by Historical Conservatives a few months later succeeded in displacing Sanclemente from power and placing Vice President José Manuel Marroquín in the presidency. However, Marroquín betrayed the *Históricos's* expectations of reform and pacification. To gain independence from the group that had sponsored his return to power, Marroquín relied on new political forces created in the course of the war aligned behind Arístides Fernández, a former doorman whose ferocious methods for capturing and repressing Liberals earned him rapid promotion through Conservative ranks. Marroquín had obviously decided to inflict an irreversible defeat on the Liberals.

#### Negotiating Peace (and Power Sharing)

Between Marroquín's coup in 1900 and the end of war, peace negotiations gave rise to a second (and last) antecedent of the 1905 reform. Almost immediately after the defeat at Palonegro, when Liberals realized that victory was impossi-

8. Manuel Monsalve Martínez, *Colombia, posesiones presidenciales, 1810–1954* (Bogotá: Editorial Iqueima, 1954), 310.

9. *ACR* 1898, p. 387.

ble, Uribe raised again the banner of minority representation, leading his party to signal that electoral reform was the price for capitulation. Moreover, initial events surrounding Marroquín's coup encouraged the hopes of electoral reform. For the ideologues of the coup, among whom Martínez Silva was prominent again, its *raison d'être* was to end the war and to lay the basis of future peace by reinitiating the debate on electoral reform and Liberal participation in power. Marroquín's unexpected change of plans obviously cut off the latent agreement between Historical Conservatives and Liberals, who nevertheless made several attempts to end the war under mutually satisfactory terms.

At the beginning of 1901, Uribe and Martínez Silva, leading figures of the new pacification efforts, initiated a series of contacts. In March Uribe traveled to New York, where Martínez Silva had been sent by the government on a diplomatic mission (which most observers interpreted as an elegant form of exile). In a revealing communication, Uribe told Martínez Silva that "the war could have ended the minute after Marroquín took power, especially if one takes into account the common goals of the Liberal and the [Historical] Conservative parties, and the similar methods employed by one and the other [i.e., revolution and coup] in order to overthrow the National regime." Nonetheless, Uribe regretted that the government did not offer "an acceptable basis for an agreement with the Liberal chiefs." Marroquín only promised safe-conducts and demanded "unconditional surrender, ignoring that Liberals form a political party with the right to be acknowledged as a social force and to receive proper representation."<sup>10</sup>

Another year of attrition, which reduced the insurrection to intermittent guerrilla warfare out of the control of Liberal generals, made clear to all actors involved that the Liberal regular army had no option but to capitulate. Still, Uribe and the other Liberal general, Benjamín Herrera—who had achieved impressive victories in Panama but could not move his forces into the continent—continued their efforts to extract political concessions from the government before signing a peace treaty. Liberals' proposals prior to the signature of the *Tratado de Neerlandia* were shaped by the correspondence between Uribe and Colonel Carlos Adolfo Urueta, the Liberal army's emissary to the government. Uribe instructed Urueta to request, as the condition for peace, the creation of an extraordinary Congress to treat constitutional reforms. Uribe also demanded a special mechanism for choosing the members of the Congress to ensure Liberals that it was not going to be a "charade." Quoting a proposal he had made to Martínez Silva in New York, Uribe urged the government, via

10. Otto Morales Benítez, *Sanclemente, Marroquín: El liberalismo y Panamá* (Bogotá: Stamato Editores, 1998), 366–67.

Urueta, “to accept that, out of the 64 seats in the Congress, 25 will be allocated to the Liberal Party, which is a very modest demand.”<sup>11</sup>

In addition to providing further evidence that the Liberals’ main concern was participation in power, the communication to Urueta reveals that Uribe was perfectly aware of the weakness of his bargaining position and the associated lack of credibility of any promise that the government could extend. For him, Liberals should turn in their weapons *after* the Congress met in order to guarantee the inclusion of Liberal representatives. But, he recognized, “it seems quite impossible to me that the government will agree to this condition [i.e., a postponement of disarmament].”<sup>12</sup> If Conservatives required military demobilization before making the promise of a special Congress with Liberal participation, then Liberals would be left with no tangible resources to sanction the Conservatives if they decided to renege on their promise. After meeting government delegates, Urueta informed Uribe that disarmament was in fact a precondition for signing any peace treaty. Moreover, after reviewing the situation of the Liberal army across the country, Urueta advised Uribe to give up hopes of concessions other than safe-conducts and reform promises. The *Tratado de Neerlandia* was finally drafted on October 24, 1902, and signed four days later. It had sixteen clauses: clauses 1 and 3 defined the steps that the demobilization of the Liberal army should follow, and only clause 14 stated that “the Liberal emissary is confident that the president will follow through on his promise that the Liberal Party will have fair representation in municipal councils, departmental assemblies, and the National Congress.”<sup>13</sup> A few weeks later Benjamín Herrera signed the *Tratado de Wisconsin*, which formally ended the war. The only political clause in the treaty included a nominal commitment by the Conservative government to encourage discussion of the proposals of electoral reform that had been submitted to the Congress in 1898 (clause 7-B).

#### The Incomplete Vote in 1905: Innovation

No politician in 1899 foresaw the devastating magnitude that the war would have. The “little skirmish of three months” that some in the government had predicted ended up lasting more than three years, causing more than 90,000 deaths and encouraging the separation of Panama as an independent mini-republic. Liberal leaders, in turn, powerlessly witnessed how their revolution

11. *Antecedentes del Tratado de Neerlandia* 1902, p. 12.

12. *Ibid.*, 13.

13. *Ibid.*, 24.

degenerated into anarchic guerrilla actions and other politically futile impulses. Probably both Conservative and Liberal politicians would have changed their decisions on the eve of war if they had known that, by the end of 1903, 4 percent of the male population would die, 7 percent of the territory would be lost, and the Colombian economy would suffer four years of paralysis in some regions and massive destruction in others.

Especially after the loss of Panama, preventing future wars became a top priority for political leaders of almost every affiliation. For the first time since the creation of parties, a broadly bipartisan consensus emerged by 1904. The consensus was built around the diagnosis of past ills and their remedies for the future. Intransigent elements from both parties finally seemed to converge on the vision of moderates, who insisted that the blame for past and recent chaos belonged to the *vieja iniquidad* (old iniquity), Martínez Silva's celebrated formula to describe the persistent political exclusion of the opposition.<sup>14</sup> In the 1904 elections, with the support of moderate Conservatives and Liberals, General Rafael Reyes was chosen as president under the slogan "Peace and Concord." Soon after he took office, a stalemate with the Congress, chosen under Marroquín's presidential term, led Reyes to close it on December 14, eliminating from the political arena the remaining intransigent Conservative elements. Instead of calling another Congress, the new president decided to reform the constitution and call a constitutional assembly, which would be inaugurated on March 15, 1905.

Anticipating future legislation on the matter, Reyes made sure that all political forces were represented in the assembly. Each of the nine departments was to send three members, one from each Conservative faction and a third one from the Liberal Party. Most prominent Colombian politicians became members of the assembly, including Victor Manuel Salazar, a Conservative general who had excelled at the war, future presidential candidate Alfredo Vásquez Cobo, the ubiquitous Uribe, and Herrera.

The assembly promptly applied the remedy prescribed in the postwar shared diagnosis: on April 13 a constitutional amendment introducing "minority representation" was passed. The legislative process was as fast as formal procedures allowed (four days), and the project received unanimous support. Bonifacio Vélez, minister of government and direct delegate of President Reyes before the assembly, submitted the proposal of electoral reform on April 10, 1905. Article 4, the core of the project, stated that "in all popular elections that have the goal of forming public corporations [e.g., legislatures], the right

14. "La Vieja Iniquidad," *Repertorio colombiano* (Bogotá), 1 Sept. 1896, pp. 161–69.

of minorities to be represented is acknowledged, and the law will define the form and terms under which such representation will be carried out.”<sup>15</sup> That same day the project was approved unanimously in “first debate,” which according to Colombian legislative rules meant that representatives agreed to submit the proposal to a special commission in charge of studying it. (According to the rules, the second debate is when modifications to the project, as suggested by the commission and the floor, are introduced, and the third and last round approves or rejects the final draft.)

On April 11, the commission, formed by Herrera (from Santander); Felipe Angulo (Bolívar), a former protégée of Núñez; and the Reyista Gerardo Pulecio (Cundinamarca), issued the report. Its first paragraph claimed that “this reform is the peace for the future; it is the first time national unity is formally proclaimed . . . for no Constitution since 1811 had had the courage to acknowledge the right of minorities to be represented; that was the cause of the countless civil wars that have scorched the country.”<sup>16</sup> The constitutional amendment introduced minority representation as a principle but did not define the specific electoral rule that would make the principle operative in practice. Two weeks after the amendment, by Law 42, the legislative assembly chose the incomplete vote. Article 33 of the law stated that two-thirds of the seats in Congress and the Senate, as well as in regional legislatures and electoral boards, would correspond to the electoral majority and the remaining one-third to the minority.<sup>17</sup> The reform assigned every district at least three representatives. For the computation of shares in districts where the number of seats at stake was not divisible by three, the law required that such number be elevated to the next one that was divisible by three, and that the majority get two-thirds of the new number minus one (e.g., in districts with seven representatives, the two-thirds were computed in relation to nine, which, after the subtraction of one seat to the majority, left the opposition with two seats).

#### The Incomplete Vote in 1910 and 1916: Ratification

Reyes's government was overthrown five years after its inauguration, but minority representation as an institution survived and in fact became a permanent feature of Colombia's political system. Two critical indications of the level of consensus achieved by the incomplete vote as a power-sharing formula were

15. *Anales de la Asamblea Nacional* 1905, p. 73.

16. *Ibid.*

17. *Ibid.*, 151.

produced in 1910 and 1916. In 1910 a constitutional assembly was convened to reform the constitution. Bipartisan in composition, the assembly made the 1886 constitution more liberal. Crucially, it eliminated all the most important constitutional innovations of the Reyes period except for minority representation. In 1916 a new electoral code was approved in order to systematize dispersed pieces of electoral legislation into a single body of rules. It covered several fields, including the definition of citizenship, the organization of electoral justice, and the schedule for elections; regarding Colombia's electoral system, it ratified the incomplete vote. Therefore, in the context of broader institutional reforms, legislative bodies twice had the opportunity to change the electoral system in the decade after 1910, but on both occasions Liberals and Conservatives agreed to preserve minority representation.

Reyes's fall and the constitutional reform of 1910 are closely connected events, for they were both the result of the rise of a new bipartisan coalition, the Republican Union. Republicanism grew mainly as a reaction against Reyes's dictatorial methods of rule, which included the closure of Congress and the adoption of extraordinary executive powers. The Conservative leg of the new coalition was largely coterminous with the old Historical faction. The Liberal leg, in turn, was represented by politicians who had progressively removed their support for the government in response not only to authoritarian measures but also to the weakening of the Nationals, the reactionary faction within the Conservative camp. Once the threat from the Nationals vanished, Liberals who had initially supported Reyes out of fear of a restoration of the *Regeneración* regime decided to join the Republican opposition. Exceptions to the realignment of the Liberal elite included top collaborators of Reyes, most prominently Uribe and his followers. The main component of the Republicans' social base was the progressive business community of Antioquia, mainly landowners and bankers who resented Reyes's intervention in the economy and the cases of corruption derived from official contracts to build public infrastructure.

After forcing Reyes's resignation in June 1909 and winning the 1910 presidential election behind the candidacy of Carlos E. Restrepo, the Republican Union encouraged constitutional reform. Many of the authoritarian methods repudiated by the Republicans had acquired constitutional status during 1905–9 due to Reyes's practice of issuing executive decrees and submitting them to ratification by ad hoc constitutional assemblies. Republicans were determined to revise the changes by Reyes, but more generally the 1910 reform was meant to translate into constitutional norms the strong bipartisan consensus that had evolved since the end of the war on the need to strengthen the rule of law and the rights of the opposition. The reform reduced the power of the

executive and enhanced that of the Congress. Thus, presidential terms were shortened from six to four years, the executive became accountable for all violations to the Constitution—not just the few specific cases foreseen by the 1886 text—and immediate reelection of the president was forbidden, whereas the Congress was assigned a chief role in the direction of foreign relations and the selection of members of the Supreme Court, and annual meetings of the legislatures were protected from presidential interference. Although these reforms involved important breaks in relation to the Reyes's regime, the key continuity was recorded at the level of the electoral rules.

During the second half of May 1910, at least four separate projects concerning electoral rules were submitted to the constitutional assembly, including one (May 15) by Nicolás Esguerra, the last survivor of the Radical Liberal period, founding figure of the Republican Union, and main architect of the constitutional reform. All four projects embraced minority representation as a general principle, and three of them specified the incomplete vote as the formula to make it operational in practice. The project enforcing only the general principle, presented by Conservative Hernando Holguin y Caro on May 20, was discussed on May 26 and became law the following day. From the extraordinary pace of the legislative process it can be inferred that no significant opposition to the project was raised. As in 1905, the final version of the constitutional amendment left to ordinary law the determination of the specific electoral rule, but, in contrast to its predecessor, it mentioned possible operational formulas: "All elections in which more than two individuals are to be chosen will be ruled by the incomplete vote, the quotient rule, the cumulative vote, or any other mechanism that insures the proportional representation of the parties. The law will define the method to make this right effective."<sup>18</sup>

The Republican Union proved to be a short-lived political force, but it left an enduring legacy in Colombian politics. Once the aspiration of constitutional reform was fulfilled, no shared goal was left to unite Conservatives and Liberals within a permanent coalition. Starting in 1914, with the election of José Vicente Concha as president, Colombia returned to the pattern of unambiguously Conservative governments. Nevertheless, the constitutional amendments of 1910 would last eight decades. Comparing the 1910 reform to the constitutions of 1863 and 1886, observers have noted that the key difference of the 1910 amendments, and the cause of their durability, is that they were consensually drafted by a bipartisan assembly, expressing the institutional visions shared by all members of the political elite, whereas the two prior constitutions were actually the

18. Hernán Montoya, *La cédula y el sufragio* (Bogotá: Imprenta Nacional, 1938), 26.

program of one party unilaterally imposed on the other after military victory.<sup>19</sup> During the Republican period, however, the Congress failed to supply an electoral law specifying a method to put minority representation into effect. As a result, until 1916, the legislative vacuum was covered by the law that established the incomplete vote in 1905 (Law 42/1905, art. 33).

In 1916 a comprehensive electoral code was adopted for the first time. Although the code, Law 85, was an extremely long text, with 307 articles in 17 chapters, it was essentially meant to achieve two broad goals: first, to establish a specific electoral rule, as required by the 1910 amendment; second, to strengthen controls over the electoral processes in order to reduce fraud and manipulation by local politicians. The project that was finally approved was originally authored by Bonifacio Vélez, Reyes's former minister and author of the 1905 constitutional amendment on minority representation. As a member of the National State Council in Concha's government, Vélez submitted his project to the Senate in August 1915. It privileged the incomplete vote over the quotient rule because, Vélez alleged, it was a better mechanism for the representation of the minority. A colorful table, attached at the end of his project, backed his point. In the table, Vélez had computed how results for the 1915 legislative elections would have yielded different proportions of Liberal and Conservative seats under different electoral systems. The table showed that the incomplete vote granted Liberals five more seats than the quotient rule.<sup>20</sup> Regarding the problem of fraud, the project included various dispositions, including one (art. 168/4) that declared invalid all elections "in which the number of votes issued is larger than the number of registered voters," not at all an uncommon situation in Colombian electoral contests.

To recapitulate, both the 1910 amendment and the 1916 electoral code ratified the incomplete vote, indicating solid bipartisan consensus for the need for minority representation. The justification given by Vélez in 1916 for the ratification of the incomplete vote could have very well been signed by any Liberal representative: "It is an undeniable fact, one that is acknowledged by our political history, that most of our civil wars, which flooded our soil with blood, paralyzed progress, and broke the bonds of peace, have originated in

19. See Jorge Orlando Melo, "De Carlos E. Restrepo a Marco Fidel Suárez: Republicanismo y gobiernos conservadores," in *Nueva historia de Colombia*, ed. Álvaro Tirado Mejía (Bogotá: Planeta, 1989), 1:220–25; and Fernando Correa Uribe, *Republicanismo y reforma constitucional, 1891–1910* (Medellín: Universidad de Antioquia, 1996), 7–10.

20. Bonifacio Vélez, *Proyecto de ley sobre reforma electoral* (Bogotá: Imprenta Nacional, 1905), 69–70.

the lack of properly representative governments, in the systematic and hateful exclusion that was installed in the republic. Minority representation prevents revolutionary attempts.”<sup>21</sup> The fall of Reyes, the rise and disappearance of the Republican Union, and increasing political tension over fraud—four rather disruptive phenomena that nevertheless did not threaten the incomplete vote at any moment—provided critical tests of the practically unanimous level of consensus achieved in favor of minority representation in Colombian politics.

#### Causes of War and Consequences of Reform

Is it possible to assess whether it was power monopolization, rather than other factors, that caused recurrent war in the second half of the nineteenth century, and whether power sharing was the cause of peace during the first half of the twentieth century? Historians and other social scientists have advanced both economic and political explanations for the periods of war before 1905 and the peace that followed.<sup>22</sup> Explanations, however, are usually meant to account for a single, discrete event, like the Thousand Days’ War, rather than the recurrent pattern of war, rebellion, and repression in the nineteenth century or the subsequent period of peaceful power sharing—let alone the macroscopic transformation of the Colombian political arena from chaos to order. Our explanation not only attempts to cover a long stretch of time, from 1850 to 1950, but it also focuses on political causes at the expense of economic ones. However, in contrast to other political explanations, our argument is deliberately specific, for among the array of political factors that could be mentioned, it emphasizes power sharing via electoral rules and a particular legislative reform, the introduction of the incomplete vote in 1905. If pressed to argue by counterfactual reasoning, we would advance twin claims: Wars in general, and the Thousand Days’ War in particular, could have been prevented if the incomplete vote had been introduced in time. Second, if the incomplete vote had not been introduced in 1905, the pattern of interparty warfare would have revived a few years later.

21. *Ibid.*, 62–63.

22. For economic explanations, see Charles W. Bergquist, *Coffee and Conflict in Colombia, 1886–1910* (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 1978); and for a political explanation see Helen Delpar, *Red against Blue: The Liberal Party in Colombian Politics, 1863–1899* (Tuscaloosa: Univ. of Alabama Press, 1981). A brilliant account of the 1885 civil war, with general implications for conflict in nineteenth century Latin America, is Malcolm Deas, “Pobreza, guerra civil y política,” in *Del poder y la gramática: Y otros ensayos sobre historia, política y literatura colombianas* (Bogotá: Tercer Mundo Editores, 1993), 121–73.

Three pieces of evidence provide support to the counterfactuals. First, at different points in time before 1905, Conservatives tried different packages of concessions to the opposition, but they never included the incomplete vote. In fact, except for electoral reform, by 1899 Sanclemente's government had resolved all other political grievances Liberals had voiced, including the abolition of the Ley de los Caballos. Electoral reform was the only persistent Liberal demand that was not met. As a posterior confirmation of the motivations driving Liberal rebellion, the year 1906 provides an instructive negative image of the year 1899: in 1899 Sanclemente put an end to extraordinary presidential powers but blocked electoral reform, whereas in 1906 Reyes granted reform but assumed dictatorial powers. Sanclemente could not avoid civil war, whereas Reyes earned generalized Liberal applause. Evidence on the terms of the exchange between Reyes and the Liberal Party abounds. Even Herrera, who would eventually withdraw his support from Reyes's administration, stated that "after almost 25 years of Conservative monopoly, Reyes allowed us to breathe, to get back into public life, to become citizens again."<sup>23</sup> A decade later, with the perspective provided by the passage of time, Liberal senator Fabio Lozano and the Conservative *costeño* Manuel Dávila Florez, in the context of a debate around a legislative proposal on "crimes against the Nation," admitted with unusual political accuracy and candor the *do ut des* between Reyes and the Liberals. After Lozano attacked the project on the grounds that it would favor tyranny, Dávila Florez noted: "But Colombian Liberalism, your Honor, wholeheartedly supported General Reyes's dictatorship." Lozano quickly replied, "I am able to prove that Liberalism did not commit any crime by supporting that government. In order to neutralize any charges, it would be enough to consider that the attitude [of support] was a response to the very special circumstance that Reyes began his administration by offering Liberals a piece of sun, political equality." Dávila Florez would not miss the opportunity provided by his opponent's confession: "But that theory is shameful because it means that Liberalism accepts dictatorial governments in exchange for participation in power."<sup>24</sup>

Second, whereas suspicion of fraud in presidential elections before 1905 was a quasi-automatic prelude to rebellion and armed conflict, after the introduction of the incomplete vote, Liberals' satisfaction with their portion of power outweighed their discontent with electoral manipulation by the Conservatives. In the 1922 presidential elections, fraud was blatant. But, in contrast to the pre-1905 antecedents, rebellion did not follow. According to our explanation, this

23. Jorge Orlando Melo, "De Carlos E. Restrepo a Marco Fidel Suárez," 217.

24. *AS* 1916, p. 558.

was because Liberals had one-third of the institutional power; after 1905, war became an option in which they had much more to lose and much less to win.

The third line of empirical support to the counterfactuals is contained in the testimony of the finest political analysts of the time, including Julio H. Palacio, Pedro Navarro, Luis Eduardo Nieto Caballero, and Hernán Montoya. All these personalities are widely recognized both for their political intelligence and their relative impartiality. According to Palacio, for instance, the blockage of the 1898 proposal by the Senate and Sanclemente “was the *causa principalísima* [most principal cause] of the devastating war.”<sup>25</sup> And vice versa, “for me, the true father of peace in Colombia, a fact that the nation still needs to acknowledge and thank, is General Reyes, who facilitated minority representation. Without the dictatorship of Reyes, the peace treaties of Neerlandia and Wisconsin would have been dead letters for a long time, and another war would have liquidated the country.”<sup>26</sup> Navarro, in turn, confidently asserted that the incomplete vote was “the best law of Reyes’s dictatorship: Colombia owes to it the internal peace that it has enjoyed for the last 33 years [*sic*, writing in 1935], the basis of its progress and material well-being.” Navarro added that peace had a second cause. “Even if it seems a paradox,” peace was also caused by “the civil war of 1899–1902, in which Liberalism proved that it was willing to make any sacrifice in order to stop the violation of public liberties and citizenship rights.”<sup>27</sup> Of course, Navarro’s two causes were sequentially connected: peace was caused by the law, which in turn was caused by Liberalism’s threat of new “sacrifices.”

Regarding the role of economic factors, our vision, if stylized, is the opposite of Charles Bergquist’s.<sup>28</sup> For this author, as for Marxists in general, economic forces provide the deep structure of the political process. Political decisions either reflect underlying economic interests or are the effect of idiosyncratic and accidental factors. According to this perspective, political decisions are not consequential: they can at most “trigger” an outcome like a war, but those outcomes had nevertheless been determined beforehand by underlying economic processes. In apparent support of Bergquist’s interpretation, the Thousand Days’ War coincided with a fiscal crisis and a sharp decline in the price

25. Julio H. Palacio, *Historia de mi vida* (Bogotá: Camacho Roldan, 1942), 249.

26. *Ibid.*, 290.

27. Pedro Navarro, *El parlamento en pijama* (Bogotá: Talleres Mundo al Día, 1935), 15,

16. For a similar appraisal by Luis Eduardo Nieto Caballero, see *Escritos escogidos* (Bogotá: Fondo de Promoción de la Cultura del Banco Popular, 1984), 2:266–67; and for Hernán Montoya’s version, see *La cédula y el sufragio*, 17.

28. Bergquist, *Coffee and Conflict in Colombia*.

of coffee, Colombia's main export. And Liberals did complain about economic policy. From our perspective, however, it is economic factors than can actually be seen as only the "triggering event" that unleashed a deeper political conflict around the historical exclusion of the opposition. As observers and participants of the events made clear, the fiscal crisis was only a symptom of the political conflict over power sharing. Martínez Silva, Miguel Samper, and other participants aware of the "political economy" of La Regeneración pointed out that most government spending was allocated to military contention and repression of the Liberals.<sup>29</sup> Economic turmoil was an indication of the impact of political conflict on the growing fiscal crisis and the associated monetary expansion of the 1890s. Finally, Liberals' complaints against La Regeneración's monetary and fiscal policies can be seen as an opportunistic move to earn support from social sectors hurt by inflation, not the reflection of opposing economic interests (which Helen Delpar proved were not so different across political parties). Ultimately, the target of Liberalism was a share of institutional power.

#### **Toward Proportional Representation: Conservative Dissension and Threat from Below in the 1920s**

The quotient rule, a standard form of proportional representation, was introduced in Colombia in November 1929. The reform was the outcome of a long and uninterrupted crusade by the Liberal Party. Liberal support for proportional representation began in the 1910s but was restricted to a few isolated voices. However, it grew stronger over the first half of the 1920s, achieving perfect unanimity by 1925. Senator Luis de Greiff, a pioneering advocate of proportional representation, was responsible for aligning fellow Liberals into a compact block behind the advocacy of the quotient rule. From 1920 to 1929, Liberals submitted to the Senate and the Congress a dozen proposals to introduce proportional representation. Cosmetic variations of the same institutional innovation, the proposals reflected Liberals' various attempts at convincing a critical mass of Conservatives about the benefits of the quotient rule. In the Conservative camp, its representatives were uniformly opposed to innovation during the first half of the 1920s. In 1926–27, perhaps persuaded by the Liberal campaign, a number of them, still insufficient to force the reform, changed their minds and announced that they would accept the elimination of the incomplete vote in favor of a more proportional electoral system. In 1928–29, the Conser-

29. Carlos Martínez Silva, *Revistas políticas publicadas en el repertorio* (Bogotá: Imprenta Nacional, 1934), 2:467–68, 500–501. See also *ACR* 1898, p. 387.

vative Party divided itself into two groups, each of which promoted a different presidential candidate for the 1930 elections. In return for Liberal support of their candidate, Alfredo Vásquez Cobo, the Vasquista group provided the necessary votes to pass the proposal of proportional representation; a transitory Conservative division allowed the decade-long Liberal campaign to eventually reach its goal.

Why did Liberals want to replace the incomplete vote with the quotient rule? And why did Conservatives resist reform? Liberals mounted a double attack against the incomplete vote, criticizing it both as a barrier against the entry of third parties (it rewarded with seats only the winner and the runner-up) and as a distortion of the relative electoral power of Liberals and Conservatives (the size of the rewards was fixed irrespective of the number of votes obtained by each party). “The main defect of the incomplete vote,” de Greiff argued in support of his 1922 project, “is that it only recognizes two parties, one of which receives 66 percent of the seats and the other 33 percent, even if that proportion does not correspond to their electoral force.”<sup>30</sup> In defending the participation of third parties, for the first time in the history of electoral reform Liberals favored an innovation that apparently had no benefits for them in terms of a bigger share of institutional power. According to Liberals, the third party that might benefit the most from the introduction of proportional representation would be the Socialists or another left-wing force, which would subtract votes from Liberalism, not from Conservatism. Why, then, would Liberals advocate so resolutely, and Conservatives resist so obstinately, the introduction of proportional representation? Three possibilities exist. First, Liberals exaggerated the vitality of third parties, believing more in the distortion argument against the incomplete vote than in the barrier argument. In this case, Liberals might have actually favored proportional representation because they expected that the number of seats they would gain by removing the one-third ceiling imposed by the incomplete vote would be larger than the number of seats lost due to the division of the opposition between Liberal and Socialist parties. Or Liberals might have genuinely believed that a Socialist Party would emerge as a significant political force. In that case, they might have favored the quotient rule either because they viewed it as a mechanism to secure a public good shared by both traditional parties, like the prevention of a Socialist revolution, or because they thought they could extract an exclusive benefit from a three-party system, for instance, the creation of a progressive Liberal-Socialist coalition that could force the government to make public policies more compatible with Liberal preferences.

30. *AS* 1922, p. 203.

### Demanding More than One-Third

If the quotient rule would enlarge the Liberal share of institutional power, this would explain why Liberals supported proportional representation and Conservatives opposed it. Liberals never admitted in public they were looking for a larger number of seats. Conservatives, in turn, insisted that, if they opposed proportional representation, it was not out of fear of a reduction of their weight in the legislatures; on the contrary, they argued that it was to prevent more power falling into their own hands. In his opposition to the proposal of proportional representation that Liberals had submitted to the Congress in 1928, Conservative Alberto Vélez Calvo argued:

If the project becomes law, Liberals are going to complain after elections; scandals will be a thousand times bigger than they are today. It is obvious that in Nariño, in Antioquia, in Boyacá, and probably in Cundinamarca, in the Santanders, and in Huila, Liberalism will be reduced to its minimal expression. Probably Conservative exuberance in those departments will not allow the opposition party to get any representatives, and we, Conservatives, do not have any interest to come to this house and fill it with three-quarters or four-fifths of the seats, instead of the two-thirds we have had.

Moreover, for Vélez Calvo, the quotient rule was a threat to public order precisely because it would eliminate the benefits that Liberals derived from the incomplete vote: “We are sure that, faced with total defeat under the new system, Liberals will for months talk about persecution, fraud, and oppression by the Conservatives. That will unsettle the country, with no benefits for anyone.”<sup>31</sup>

### Proportional Representation as a Public Good

In the early 1920s, politicians of all persuasions recognized that the incomplete vote had been the basis of social peace for the prior 15 years. However, social change over that same period made the incomplete vote obsolete as a mechanism of power sharing—or so Liberals argued. Sustained economic growth during the two decades after the Thousand Days’ War had in effect fostered urbanization, industrialization, and the rise of a working class that, if still small, acquired political salience by organizing strikes, unions, confederations, and

31. *ACR* 1928, p. 384.

proto-parties like the Socialist Party (its first platform was issued in 1919). To persuade the government of the need of a new electoral reform, Liberals argued that sooner or later the incomplete vote, by marginalizing third parties, would push Labor-based parties like the Socialists into revolutionary tactics, in the same way that the majoritarian system had forced Liberals into civil war the previous century. This argument recurred most often in Liberal vindications of the quotient rule.

In the 1922 legislative debate around de Greiff's proposal, Liberal senator Eugenio Gómez argued that "social peace is not only affected by armed movements but mainly by an unfair law [i.e., the incomplete vote] that does not allow the representation of important currents of opinion. . . . Given that the current law assumes that a party different from the historical ones does not exist, and given that such parties do exist, there are good reasons for many of our citizens to feel deprived of their political rights and be dissatisfied with the existing order."<sup>32</sup> Two years later, in the introduction of his own proposal of electoral reform, prominent Liberal senator Alejandro Galvis Galvis warned: "We have the obligation to prevent agitation, turmoil, and sacrifices. New trends are emerging that will cause serious frustration if not channeled properly by explicitly acknowledging their force and influence."<sup>33</sup> In providing arithmetical examples of how the quotient rule would work, Galvis's tables included the Socialist Party as if it had become a permanent element of Colombia's party system.<sup>34</sup> The argument recurred in the sessions of the following year, when for the first time the entire block of Liberal senators signed a collective proposal on proportional representation as a signal of how intensely committed they were to electoral reform. "It is imperative to modify the straitjacket imposed by the incomplete vote," declared the document. Proportional representation would "allow political, economic, and social parties to express themselves in their full force and induce them to work within the framework of the rule of law for the preservation of peace. Public order needs [reform]."<sup>35</sup> In 1927 Liberal senators again followed the tactics of signing a collective proposal, which this time was reinforced by a symmetric movement by the block of Liberal representatives in Congress. According to its declaration of motives, proportional representation "provides room for action to legions of Colombians who do not fit any more within old programs and the traditional party organizations." The rise of new

32. *AS* 1922, p. 473.

33. *AS* 1924, p. 374.

34. *Ibid.*

35. *AS* 1925, p. 145.

parties “must be used in favor of the country. The current law [incomplete vote] is anachronistic and has already given to us all the good things it can provide.” The block of senators did not miss the opportunity to reiterate the catastrophic consequences that would follow if the legislatures failed to introduce the quotient rule. If the political “currents that live underground and press to emerge to the surface” do not receive participation in Congress, then “the republic will last as long as the discontented masses want it to.”<sup>36</sup> During the debate of the same proposal in Congress, Liberal Carlos Hernández traced the trajectory of Colombia’s electoral systems: “With the old system of absolute majorities, only one party had representation. With the current system of the incomplete vote, two parties have representation. With the quotient rule, in the future all trends with enough force will have the door open to representation.”<sup>37</sup> He added that if the Congress did not provide new electoral rules, third parties “will conquer the representation they have the right to either by the suffrage or by revolution. Tyranny or revolution. These two extremes, which will be the death of the republic, are the outcomes we, the two traditional and big parties, must avoid as a common cause.”<sup>38</sup> In 1928, Representative Gabriel Turbay, one of the most brilliant Liberal speakers and strategists, entered the debate only to provide new rhetoric for old concepts. He argued that, back in the decade of 1910, “the incomplete vote involved a big victory and progress, but it left the legacy of injustice, the abhorrent and arbitrary notion that only two parties can live. . . . The coexistence of the two big collectivities is what gave birth to the system of *repartimiento de prebendas* [rent sharing], the inevitable outcome of the iron circle of Colombian parliamentarism.”<sup>39</sup>

#### Proportional Representation as a Partisan Good

Faced with the rise of Labor-based parties, Liberals might have actually envisioned proportional representation as a mechanism to advance or protect partisan interests rather than as a public solution to potential political disorder. De Greiff, for instance, thought that the representation of left-wing parties in the legislatures could create an institutional ally to join the Liberals in a movement for progressive reforms. In a dispute with an ardent defender of the incomplete vote, de Greiff asked: “What fundamental innovation, in the area of public

36. *AS* 1927, p. 294.

37. *ACR* 1927, p. 351.

38. *Ibid.*, 352, 353.

39. *ACR* 1928, p. 378.

instruction for instance, can be attempted with the famous 33 percent equilibrium? Minorities have to restrict their focus to secondary laws: to vote laws on honors and pensions, because all substantial reform crashes against the force of the resistance imposed by the incomplete vote."<sup>40</sup> If proportional representation became law, some of the new Socialist seats would probably be obtained at the expense of the Liberal Party, but Liberals might nevertheless prefer reform if the aggregate weight of a Liberal-Socialist coalition surpassed the one-third of seats that were allocated to them by the incomplete vote. That is, Liberals could have been willing to trade a reduction of the party's institutional power for increased chances of policy reforms.

Liberals might have also hoped that proportional representation would divide the Conservative Party. Conservative divisions would favor policy reforms by forcing Conservative subgroups to compete for Liberal support in their preferred policy areas and hence to make concessions in other areas. Conservatives, not Liberals, acknowledged this potential transformation of Colombia's traditional two-party system. As Julio Eduardo Ramírez, member of the Valencista group, noted only weeks before the proportional representation became law in 1929:

[The quotient rule] is lethal for traditional parties, especially for the Conservatives, which is an organized party, and its force stems from its discipline. The quotient formula opens the gate to all kinds of dissolvent forces and personal ambitions; it brings anarchy into elections; it weakens the cohesion that must exist within political groups, to the point that these—not too far in the future—may lose their own shape; finally, it fosters indiscipline and dissidence, atomizing opinion, leaving it without leaders and directors, essential factors in all parties.<sup>41</sup>

Naturally, not all reasons had the same weight in the minds of Liberal representatives or were equally prominent across legislative debates. For instance, whereas de Greiff in 1922 viewed proportional representation as a formula to improve his party's 33 percent quota, Turbay in 1928 thought that electoral reform would transform Colombia's party system to make it more compatible with the social cleavages of a mass society. Despite variations in terms of the underlying justification, the aggregate result was the same throughout the 1920s: unanimous Liberal support for proportional representation. Unfortu-

40. *AS* 1922, p. 574.

41. *ACR* 1929, p. 479.

nately for Liberalism, no matter how uniform and strong their commitment to the quotient rule was, there was nothing they could do without the approval of the Conservative majority, or a fraction of it.

#### The 1929 Juncture

The unified resistance of Conservatism against proportional representation broke down in 1929. A year before, the Conservative Party had divided itself around the two candidates for the presidential election of 1930, Guillermo Valencia and Alfredo Vásquez Cobo. Vasquistas joined Liberalism in favoring the elimination of the incomplete vote and the introduction of a new electoral rule. In contrast to Liberalism's multifaceted justification of the quotient rule, however, the Vasquistas' motivation was straightforward: they needed the votes of the Liberal Party to secure the electoral victory of their own candidate. In exchange, they offered collaboration with a package of Liberal initiatives in Congress, including centrally the quotient rule. Vociferous opponents of proportional representation before 1927, like Carlos Jaramillo Isaza or Rafael Trujillo Gómez, suddenly became ardent defenders of reform. Some, like Senator Benjamín Guerrero, who not too many sessions before had claimed that rural villages were too uneducated to understand proportional representation and too poor to receive education, went as far as to allege a vast pedigree in favor of reform: "I am an advocate of the quotient rule, and I have presented projects establishing such principles since 1912."<sup>42</sup> The true motivation of the Vasquistas was publicly known, and Valencistas denounced it: "Our group will not risk, in return for short-term political gains, the integrity of the Conservative doctrine it advocates."<sup>43</sup> Valencismo's opposition, however, was powerless against the numerical superiority of the so-called "pliers" formed by the Liberal-Vasquista alliance. The original project was introduced by Liberal representative Guillermo Peñaranda Arenas, it was debated in the Congress between mid-September and early October and in the Senate in late October, and it became law on November 5, 1929 (Law 31).

In their campaign for proportional representation, Liberals and Vasquista Conservatives resorted to the same kind of "public good" argument that Liberals had advanced so many times in former sessions: economic change in previous decades had encouraged the emergence of new social groups, and new social groups, if not granted political representation, involve a threat of antidemocratic

42. *AS* 1929, p. 486.

43. *ACR* 1929, p. 479.

revolutionary movements. Naturally, Liberals did not mention their ambitions for a greater share of power, and Vasquistas omitted any reference to the electoral gains they expected to obtain from the alliance with the opposition. The novelty in the context of the 1929 sessions, however, was that Liberals and Vasquistas furnished the public-good argument with a decidedly gloomy tone. Their discourses took for granted that an institutional crisis was an imminent fact. In the introduction to his project, for instance, Peñaranda Arenas asserted that “the problem [of political representation] has never been as acute as it is today. It is urgent to stop the discredit of the legislatures and the final ruin of republican institutions.”<sup>44</sup> Trujillo Gómez, the Vasquista representative recently converted to the creed of proportional representation, similarly diagnosed that Colombian democracy suffered a “lethal illness” because “the voice of rural and industrial workers” and “the interests of professions and trades” have not been “heard in this Parliament.” The incomplete vote is a “system that ignores the living forces from the suburbs, ranches, workshops, and factories,” and for that reason it is to be blamed for the “twilight of democracy,” which, among other “disturbing problems,” includes “systematic abstention and popular fatigue with the electoral function.” For Trujillo Gómez, proportional representation meant “the opportunity to stop this disaster: tomorrow it will be too late.”<sup>45</sup> According to the opening statement in the report of the commission that studied the project in the Senate, “democracy suffers a regrettable bankruptcy due to the fact that the people have lost their faith in the electoral system.” Like Liberals and Vasquistas in Congress, the commission in the Senate predicted that proportional representation would “restore the lost trust and return the prestige to the legislatures, reviving civic enthusiasm around electoral contests.”<sup>46</sup>

Like the incomplete vote in 1905, the introduction of proportional representation in 1929 was a concession by the Conservative government to the Liberal opposition. In contrast to the 1905 reform, in return for which Conservatives secured political peace in the long term, the 1929 reform was expected to provide a short-term political gain for a faction of the party in power. Although different Liberal lawmakers favored proportional representation for different reasons, Vasquista Conservatives had only one motivation for the approval of a new electoral reform, namely, to obtain Liberal support for the presidential candidacy of Vásquez Cobo. The electoral motivation, which the rival faction of the party did not hesitate to condemn, was naturally hidden behind the rhetorical invocation of higher goals, including the incorporation of the incipient work-

44. *ACR* 1929, p. 9.

45. *ACR* 1929, p. 214.

46. *AS*, 1929, p. 815.

ing class into the institutional arena as a third party (a goal that some Liberals apparently did embrace).

### **Electoral Traditions, Power Sharing, and the Incomplete Vote in Latin America**

To conclude, we place our findings on the Colombian transition from majoritarian rule to proportional representation in relation to the recent literature on the electoral history of Colombia; we also assess the relation between institutions of power sharing in the first half of the twentieth century and the outbreak of new episodes of violence in the second half; finally, we draw general theoretical lessons about the origins of electoral rules and explore their application to other Latin American cases.

#### Power Sharing and the Colombian Electoral Tradition

Recent historiography has underscored the existence of what Eduardo Posada-Carbó has called an “electoral tradition” in Colombia, the roots of which can allegedly be traced to the independence period.<sup>47</sup> This tradition manifests itself in the energy that politicians of both parties have routinely invested in elections, including campaigns adapted to different audiences, the early appearance of political newspapers, and an ongoing interest in gaining the electoral favor of an increasing number of sectors in society. But elections were not the only arena in which politicians competed for political power; the allocation of political power in Colombia was also decided in negotiations about the rules that defined how votes would translate into seats. Between 1910 and 1930, leaders of both parties invested extraordinary amounts of effort in debates over the design of institutions governing elections. Throughout the period, no other issue received more attention in the legislatures. Specialists in electoral rules included top leaders like Uribe, who drafted a proposal for the first systematic electoral code; Miguel Abadía Méndez and Enrique Olaya Herrera, whose intervention was crucial for the approval of the law banning “pirate lists” in 1920<sup>48</sup>; or José Vicente Concha, the author of a handbook on constitutional law that contained the most up-to-

47. Eduardo Posada-Carbó, “Limits of Power: Elections under the Conservative Hegemony in Colombia, 1886–1930,” *HAHR* 77, no. 2 (1997): 245–80; and “La tradición electoral,” in *Fortalezas de Colombia*, ed. Fernando Cepeda Ulloa (Bogotá: Ariel / Banco Interamericano de Desarrollo, 2004).

48. In several elections, the Conservative Party presented two lists of candidates with the expectation of obtaining both the seats of the majority and the minority.

date taxonomy of electoral rules. In the legislatures, debates around electoral rules reached peaks of sophistication when, for example, the Liberal de Greiff displayed complicated arithmetical computations to illustrate how different combinations of electoral rules would work. The legislative debate naturally extended into the media, but it also reached academia. Before 1930, at least 19 doctoral theses were written on the topic of proportional versus majoritarian representation. Concha and Olaya Herrera were regular members of dissertation committees. In sum, both elections and debates around the rules governing elections were vibrant political arenas, and they both mattered for the distribution of political power between Conservatives and Liberals.

#### The Breakdown of Proportional Representation's Effects

Although politics in contemporary Colombia is obviously outside the scope of our research, a natural question emerges: if power sharing was so effective in reducing conflict through the late 1940s, why did political violence return to Colombia while proportional representation was still in place? Two lines of analysis—one sociological, the other political—demonstrate the consistency between our explanation of political order during the first half of the twentieth century and the occurrence of long periods of chaos in the second half. First, the explosion of *La Violencia* in the late 1940s suggests that institutions for sharing political power, such as the incomplete vote, are best suited for managing certain kinds of conflict in specific types of society. The incomplete vote is most effective as a pacification mechanism in an oligarchic society, where politics is dominated by a reduced number of political factions that are either recruited from the dominant economic groups or agree in promoting the basic parameters of a primary export economy. Economic modernization, with the corresponding emergence of a more complex society and new social groups, may have caused the positive effects of power sharing to expire. The incomplete vote made possible the incorporation of an oligarchic opposition into an oligarchic government. The political incorporation of the social groups brought about by economic modernization, advancing demands that are characteristic of mass society, naturally requires different institutional and policy transformations; proportional representation is not enough. The failure of Colombian political institutions to adapt themselves to a new kind of society can be thought of as equivalent in terms of its effects on political order to Sanclemente's failure to incorporate Liberal oligarchies before the Thousand Days' War.

A second, political reason for the expiration of the positive effects of electoral rules is the decline of the parties' interest in controlling the legislative

branch relative to their aspirations of gaining access to the presidency. Growth in the size of government, a secular trend shared by almost all countries in the region, increased the value of the presidency as a political reward to partisan activity. In Colombia the party system became increasingly competitive starting in the early 1920s. The 1922 presidential election revealed to both parties that Liberals had regained enough strength to be a formidable electoral rival. When they were a clear minority, Liberals had contented themselves with a piece of Congress, and Conservatives did not feel any threat to their control over the presidency. A problem arose when both parties were able to compete for the presidency because, by its very nature, executive power is substantially harder to share than legislative power. The power-sharing institutions designed in 1905 acted to foster coexistence of parties only in the legislatures. Significantly, the Frente Nacional, the coalition government that managed to put an end to La Violencia, is a form of power sharing at the level of the executive branch.

#### Rokkan's Theory: From Scandinavia to the Tropics and the Pampas

The Colombian case illustrates that the leading argument in political science about the origins of electoral institutions, due to Rokkan, is correct: parties choose forms of representation to maximize their share of seats in congress. However, our research also points to an important caveat: parties maximize institutional power subject to the constraint that political order is preserved, which is done by making sure that rival parties receive a share of political power sufficient to dissuade them from destabilizing tactics. In the Scandinavian cases analyzed by Rokkan, proportional forms of representation were introduced by Conservative elites in power, who anticipated that the increasing popularity of the Socialist Party would soon send them into the opposition. Proportional representation, according to the calculations of the Conservatives, would prevent full control of the parliament by the Left and ensure a quota of power for the Conservative Party once they became a minority. The obvious question that the same Scandinavian cases pose, and Rokkan left unanswered, is why Socialist parties did not switch back to majoritarian forms of rule after they gained control of government. Such a reversal would in fact have maximized their presence in the legislatures.

Extending the political logic of our analysis of the Colombian case, it is plausible that Scandinavian Socialists preserved proportional representation because they did not want to risk alienating the opposition and forcing it into antidemocratic methods. Conventional arguments in political science on the

origins of electoral reform can thus be generalized. Motivations for electoral reform include not only the ambition of parties to make their share of seats as large as possible but also the fear of destabilization by the opposition. In two-party systems, the largest political party favors the electoral rule that over-represents the electoral majority (that is, majoritarian rule), unless such over-representation induces a significant threat of rebellion by the minority, in which case the big party will accede to more proportional forms of representation. That is the main theoretical lesson that can be extracted from our analysis of the Colombian case.

Although the incomplete vote is an exotic species of electoral rule, it found fertile soil in other South American countries. The incomplete vote was introduced in Uruguay in 1898 and in Argentina in 1912, and in both cases it was the outcome of a political process that provides further evidence on the role of electoral reform as a device for peaceful power sharing between government and opposition. In Uruguay and Argentina, reform was introduced by a political elite that feared revolution by the opposition more than it feared electoral defeat. In fact, as in Colombia in 1905, in both countries the party in government at the time of the adoption of the incomplete vote was confident of remaining in power well into the foreseeable future (although in the Argentine case this confidence was misplaced). The government sponsored an electoral reform that would inexorably shrink its presence in the legislatures. The only strategic motivation for reform, then, was appeasement.

The trajectory of the Uruguayan party system prior to the introduction of the reform is remarkably similar to the Colombian one: two historical parties, Colorados and Blancos, dominated the scene; like the Colombian Conservatives, Colorados achieved political hegemony by the end of the century and, like Colombian Liberals, Blancos were willing to challenge it through armed rebellion. An important difference between the two systems is that, in Uruguay, the territorial cleavage between the parties ran deeper than in Colombia, whereas the ideological one was more diffuse. In fact, the Uruguayan parties only disagreed over the participation of the opposition in government. Due to the geographical concentration of partisan forces, the Blancos fought not only for minority representation in Congress but also for control of a subset of the departments in which the Uruguayan territory is politically divided. Colorado governments acceded to both demands, but only after major civil wars. Blanco control over a fraction of departments was the achievement of the *Revolución de las Lanzas* (1870–72) and had to be regained in 1904 through a new military uprising after the Colorados reneged on their original commitment. Similarly, the institutionalization of minority representation in the Uruguayan Congress

was a direct consequence of the military uprising led by caudillo Aparicio Saravia in 1897. The intimate connection between pacification and electoral reform is revealed by the fact that the introduction of the incomplete vote was the main clause in the Pacto de la Cruz (September 1897), the peace agreement that put a formal end to Saravia's rebellion. (The pact thus has an identical political meaning to the Treaties of Neerlandia and Wisconsin in the Colombian case.)

In 1905, sensing that Uruguay was entering a new era of peaceful coexistence between the two parties, José Espalter, a prominent Colorado legislator, drew natural counterfactual conclusions:

Those who live in the country know that we could have avoided the Blanco revolution of 1897, and perhaps all other rebellions as well, if we had introduced an electoral system that allowed Blancos to have a minority in Congress. Someone heard one of our great statesmen saying: "give Blancos 12 legislators, and we will prevent war." War was not prevented because the opposition was not granted even one representative. The basis of peace was the law of incomplete vote, which allowed the minority to get a third of the representation. The law of the third is in fact the peace!<sup>49</sup>

In Argentina, the incomplete vote was one of the three innovations introduced by the famous Ley Sáenz Peña, which gained continental prominence for its two other components, the secret ballot and mandatory suffrage. These two components meant full democratization of the oligarchic order established in the late 1870s. For the political elite that crafted the reform, however, the incomplete vote was no less crucial than effective democratization: around 70 percent of the legislative debate, including the best presentations by individual legislators, focused on the type of electoral rule. The complexity of the reform reveals that those who designed it were pursuing multiple goals. The consolidation of political stability, however, was clearly a chief motivation.

Unlike in Colombia and Uruguay, in the last quarter of the nineteenth century Argentina witnessed the consolidation of a single-party system, dominated by the conservative Partido Autonomista Nacional. The challenger of the regime in Argentina was a new actor, the Unión Cívica Radical. Like the older oppositions in the other two countries, the main demand of the Radical Party was participation in power, and it also espoused insurgent tactics. The Radical

49. José Espalter, *El problema nacional* (Montevideo: Imprenta Tribuna Popular, 1905), 59–60.

Party was born as a splinter of the failed revolutionary movement mounted in 1890 by oligarchic groups excluded from government. Radicals rebelled again in 1893 and 1905, with no immediate results, but the sequence of uprisings helped to create a reformist movement within the conservative elite. In 1910, when president Roque Sáenz Peña promised electoral reform, a revolutionary episode was not imminent, but reformist conservatives were persuaded that the long-term consolidation of political stability required power sharing. "If the majority was not so selfish, the minority would never pose a threat to the institutional order," claimed Sáenz Peña himself in the brief message with which he submitted the bill of electoral reform to the Congress in August 1911.<sup>50</sup> In one of the best allocutions of the legislative debate, reformist legislator Ramón Cárcano resorted to metaphor to describe what was at stake with the reform: "When escape valves are closed, the boiler explodes. Every 10 years, following the fatal movement of a cosmic law, rebellion has shocked and mutilated the Republic. . . . For the last 20 years, the government has either fought open rebellions or feared the threat of them. Our current electoral laws are a bad system and a bad policy: they alienate citizens, induce abstention, and arm the opposition. Blood, prisons, proscriptions, trials, paralysis of wealth, commerce and work."<sup>51</sup> Four years after the reform was approved, and to the surprise of conservative forces, the Radical Party won the presidency. Like the Scandinavian socialists in relation to proportional representation, Radicals preserved the incomplete vote, although the reintroduction of majoritarian rule would have furnished them with full control of Congress.

The introduction of the incomplete vote under the threat of rebellion by the opposition in both Uruguay and Argentina provides further evidence of the connection between conflict management and power-sharing institutions. These cases, taken together with the Colombian one, invite the development of a new research agenda: the comparative study of intraoligarchic conflict in Latin America. Democratization involves at least two subprocesses: in addition to the achievement of universal participation, it includes the emergence of a mechanism for peaceful coexistence between government and opposition. Divisions within the oligarchy generally preceded the emergence of the middle class and labor movements. Correspondingly, the search for a formula for a civilized relation between government and opposition was usually a challenge that dominant national oligarchies in Latin America had to face before they confronted

50. Roque Sáenz Peña, *La reforma electoral y temas de política internacional americana* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Raigal, 1952), 89.

51. *Diario de Sesiones de la Cámara de Diputados* 1911, 2:159–60.

demands for universal suffrage. The study of intraoligarchic conflict, and the solutions adopted (or lack thereof), is then crucial for understanding a pillar of modern political systems. Differences in timing in resolving intraoligarchic conflict in relation to other political innovations and social processes are consequential. In Colombia and Uruguay, power sharing between oligarchic groups through the representation of rival parties in Congress preceded by several decades the extension of the franchise to the entire population. In Argentina, by contrast, universal participation and the right of the opposition to be represented in the legislatures were enacted at the same time. Arguably, due to delayed adoption and overlap with the advent of mass politics, mechanisms of peaceful coexistence between government and opposition in Argentina lacked enough time to take root. In Colombia, the strong institutionalization of power sharing between Conservatives and Liberals before the introduction of effective universal suffrage in part explains the adaptability of the traditional two-party system; it may also account for the ability of historical parties to collude and thwart the emergence of democratic reformist movements.

